

Suppressing the Immune System for Organ Transplants






In many cases, organ transplantation offers the gift of life—a new kidney, liver, or heart can save a person's life and can allow him or her to lead a full and healthy life.

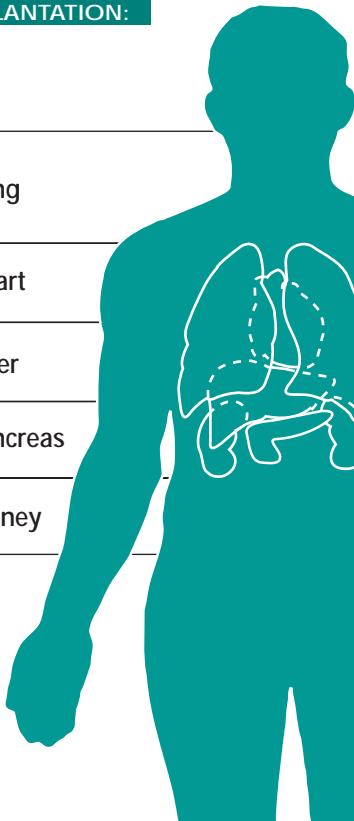
After a person receives an organ transplant, certain aspects of the immune system must be purposely suppressed by drugs to keep the body from rejecting tissue that it considers foreign. All patients (except those who receive an organ from an identical twin)

must take drugs (sometimes called anti-rejection drugs) to attempt to keep their bodies from rejecting the new organ. These anti-rejection drugs must be continued for the rest of their lives.

An article in the May 10, 2000, issue of *JAMA* reports on the expense of anti-rejection drugs used for organ transplantation. The authors also write about possible ways to pay for these drugs.

TYPES OF ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION:

	Lung
	Heart
	Liver
	Pancreas
	Kidney



AFTER ORGAN TRANSPLANTATION:

- Take medication to protect your new organ as prescribed by your doctor
- Have regular tests to check on the condition of your new organ
- Maintain your rehabilitation program
- Eat healthy foods and maintain a healthy weight

DONATING ORGANS FOR TRANSPLANTATION:

- Fill out and sign a donor card and always carry it with you
- Most importantly, let your family and loved ones know about your wish to donate an organ
- Indicate on your driver's license or state ID card your wish to be an organ donor (not available in all states)

Even if you sign a donor card, most states require that a close family member (such as a spouse, adult sibling, or adult child) gives permission before organs can be removed. Therefore, it is important that you let whoever will be making these decisions know of your wish to be a donor, in order to give the gift of life.

PROPER USE OF ANTI-REJECTION DRUGS:

- Take all medications every day on schedule as prescribed by your doctor
- You may have to take a number of different medications every day; this could include drugs you were taking before the transplantation
- Always discuss any adverse reactions you are experiencing with your doctor
- Never change the amount of medication or schedule for taking the medication, without first discussing it with your doctor
- If you are taking any other drugs (prescriptions or non-prescription) tell your doctor so that he or she can help you avoid drug interactions
- Inform your doctor before you take a new non-prescription or prescription drug, including herbal medicines.
- Wear or carry something that lists the medications you take and the fact that you have a transplanted organ, in case you become unconscious or cannot speak for yourself

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- United Network for Organ Sharing 888/894-6361 (information for patients) or www.unos.org
- Coalition on Donation 800/355-SHARE (for brochure on donation) or www.shareyourlife.org

INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. A previous *JAMA* Patient Page on organ and tissue donation was published on October 7, 1998.

Additional Sources: United Network for Organ Sharing, American Society of Transplantation, The AMA Family Medical Guide, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine, The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health

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